

# Cinema

## Chevy Chase's 'Funny Farm' lacks originality, continuity

Chevy Chase's latest film, "Funny Farm," resembles the 1960s TV hit series, "Green Acres," about a New York lawyer and his extravagant wife who move to the country for a peaceful life of farming. In this movie, screenwriter Jeffrey Boam and director George Roy Hill put their heads together to come up with a yuppie "Green Acres."

Although Boam and Hill assumed that Chase would get the laughs naturally, they failed to realize that even Chase can't ad-lib his way through an entire movie, leaving a jumbled mess.

In "Funny Farm," New York sportswriter Andy Farmer (Chase) and his wife Elizabeth (Madolyn Smith) move to the fictitious New England town of Redbud to escape the city and to work on their novels. The movers get lost, and the Farmers spend the first night in their new home

**James Mills**  
**Cinema**

sleeping on the hard wooden floor doing without dinner. The Farmers should have taken this as an omen and moved back to New York, saving themselves and viewers a lot of time.

While adjusting to country life, the Farmers work on their novels, buy a dog that immediately runs away, find a corpse in the garden and have to pay for the funeral, discover snakes in the pond and wind up installing a pay phone in the kitchen. Things in Redbud just aren't as the Farmers imagined they would be.

Redbud's townfolks aren't the Norman Rockwell type either. Instead, they are an eccentric lot: a sheriff who must be driven around

in a taxi because he has failed his driver's test; an antique dealer who sells only her cherished family possessions; and a drunken postman who tosses the mail out the window while speeding around town.

All the elements for a good movie are present, but they just don't work together. The viewer never really cares for Chase's character. Smith's character is far more likable, but she is never allowed to upstage the star,

making her comic scenes scarce.

While director Hill goes to great lengths in setting up comedic scenes, he seems to steer away from them immediately after the payoff, rarely allowing the characters to react and develop. Scenes seem to endure forever before the punchline finally arrives — but the jokes are seldom worth the wait.

This is not to say that "Funny Farm" lacks laughs. On the contrary,

the eccentric Redbud residents are humorous, and many jokes work — such as a running gag with a Dutch door and a scene with Chase trying to break the record for the number of fried lamb testicles (although Chase is unaware of their identity) eaten in a diner.

But overall, eccentric characters and a few good laughs comprise only about 30 minutes of laughs from a film which lasts nearly two hours.

## 'Poltergeist III' relies on effects while ignoring plot, characters

**Dale Smyth**  
**Cinema**

"Poltergeist III" exemplifies the worst kind of Hollywood movie — one based on only special effects. Like the makers of "The Witches of Eastwick" and "Beetlejuice," the people who bring us "Poltergeist III" apparently conceived their film as a series of visual spectacles and only added a story and characters as an afterthought.

Admittedly, special effects have been the major box-office attraction for more than a decade now, but back in the 1970s when this started, filmmakers George Lucas and Steven Spielberg always produced good stories with believable characters. The special effects, although stunning, were never anything more than props used to tell the story. But in "Poltergeist III," the special effects are the story — if you can call it a story. Worse, the special effects rank second to those of Lucas and Spielberg.

The story is basically the same as

the first two "Poltergeist" movies, with violent spirits coming from "the other side" to terrorize the family. The spirits abduct the little girl, and the rest of the family must fight to get her back. Eventually the spirits return the little girl and go away.

But the problem with the whole "Poltergeist" series is that the writers never give enough information about the spirits. For instance, they never explain what "the other side" is or give its location, nor do they say why the spirits want the little girl. One of the spirits keeps moaning to the little girl that he wants her to take him "to the light," but even the meaning of these words is ambiguous.

A more serious problem with the

story, though, is that the spirits seem to be able to do anything they please. They open a magic hole in the floor to suck in three people, transform a woman into a rotten corpse and animate a squadron of cars to attack a husband and wife. They leave the family defenseless against them, making the story one of victimization, not conflict.

Well-developed characters are important for the success of even those movies that are meant only to entertain, but in "Poltergeist III," the characters aren't even defined. The viewer doesn't sympathize with a single character, nor does he believe any character to be a real person. The writers sketch the personalities with about as much detail as those found in a "Friday the 13th" movie, with dialogue that is often irrelevant to the story. And the acting is, at worst, embarrassing. These characters are themselves mere props to react to the scary happenings.

In short, seeing "Poltergeist III" is not worth \$4.50. Go see "Willow" instead. It's not another "Star Wars," but it has a good story, funny and interesting characters and first-rate special effects.

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